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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effects on individual students of the integration of the visual, performing and/or musical arts, within their civics, English, history, and geography curricula. The paper describes a qualitative multiple-site study of students in 11 rural, suburban, and urban elementary, middle, and high schools. Integrated units ranged from 4- to 6-week thematic units to whole-year integrated courses of study. In-depth interviews were conducted over a 1-year period with students, teachers, and administrators. Analysis of the data indicates students made connections among different subject areas, thus gaining a deeper understanding of content in all related subject areas. Incorporation of curricular content in various intelligence areas provides opportunities for those students who may have difficulty in verbal or mathematical areas to learn and express their knowledge. Findings also suggest a significant increase in students' positive attitudes towards school and in their self-concepts. The study concludes that integration of the arts into the regular curriculum has a positive effect on students. (EH)

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The Arts in Curriculum Integration

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects on individual students of integration of the visual, performing and/or musical arts, within their civics, English, history, and geography curriculums. This paper describes a qualitative, multiple site study of students in eleven rural, suburban, and urban elementary, middle and high schools. Integrated units ranged from four to six week thematic units to whole year integrated courses of study. In depth interviews were conducted over a one year period with students, teachers, and administrators. Analysis of the data from the interviews indicates that students make connections between different subject areas thus gaining a deeper understanding of content in all related subject areas. It also suggests that incorporation of curricular content in various intelligence areas provides opportunities for those students who may have difficulty in verbal or mathematical areas to learn and express their knowledge. The findings also suggest a significant increase in students' positive attitude toward school and in students' self-concept. It appears that integration of the arts into the regular curriculum has a positive effect on students.

THE ARTS IN CURRICULUM INTEGRATION

Objectives

Historically, arts education in our schools, when it has been present at all, has been provided during a separate class period and taught by a separate arts teacher. The art teacher would sometimes be asked to supplement the regular curriculum by giving suggestions for music from a particular time period or an art activity related to something being done in the classroom. But in general, when students had their arts classes, the regular classroom teacher had planning time. Little if any connections were made between what students were learning in their arts classes and what they were learning in their other classes. Nor were there connections made between how they were learning in their arts classes and how they were, or could be learning in the regular classroom. However, that is slowly changing as the value and benefits of integrating the arts into the regular education curriculum are being realized by educators who typically had not been associated with arts education. Both elementary and secondary classroom teachers are addressing such issues as students' attitudes toward themselves and school, incorporation of multiple intelligence areas, accommodation for differences in students' abilities, and criticisms of irrelevant/fragmented curriculum through integration of the arts into their curriculum. These innovative teachers are seeing many positive results, both in areas of academics and students' self-concept when dance, the visual arts, theater and/or music are combined with content area subjects into an integrated curriculum.

Much of the research on arts integration has been about specific programs involving arts schools, or students drawn to an arts curricula. The purpose of this multiple site study is to describe integration of the arts, civics, English, history and geography as it was implemented in

various elementary, middle and high school curriculums and to report its effects on individual students.

Theoretical Framework

Student Attitudes. Those involved in arts education (Laney & Moseley, 1994, p. 245) have long contended that well-designed arts education, when integrated with other subjects serves, "to motivate students by making learning more fun." Information such as attendance records and test scores from schools nationwide give proof that arts education can "grab" those students most at risk of dropping out of school by offering active involvement of both their minds and their bodies (Hanna, 1992). At schools such as the Artists-in-Residence Program of the Music Center of Los Angeles and the St. Augustine School of the Arts in the South Bronx, improvement was shown in grade point average, problem solving skills, and written and oral communication when arts education was an integral part of the curriculum. Hanna also cited studies that showed the arts encouraged students to stay in school and helped to build their confidence to take risks in other classes. Oddleifson (1994, p. 447) also found that, "Students who study the arts respect their peers and treat them well. They enjoy coming to school, working hard, and succeeding." LEAP (Learning Through an Expanded Arts Program), a New York City based, non-profit educational organization, was set up to reach economically disadvantaged minority children through an arts-oriented approach to learning. Standardized evaluations of various projects in the program have shown impressive gains in understanding of subject matter, problem solving skills, self-discipline and a more positive attitude toward school (Dean & Gross, 1992).

Intelligences and Abilities. Recent research on cognition has changed our perception of how learning takes place. Cognitive theory contradicts the notion which has previously dominated the field of education, that learners are passive vessels to be filled up with information. Danielson (1996) acknowledges this when she states, "Knowledge acquired through memorizing information and procedures is not permanent and is generally retained only until it is tested or until its use is ended. And if such knowledge is not fully understood, it is easily dislodged." Rather, cognitive theory supports the idea that new knowledge is acquired when information previously received by the brain is processed through a series of symbols with additional information to provide the learner with a new basis of knowledge. Learners are therefore actively constructing meaning based on their own past experience; they are not just objects waiting to be acted upon. This way of thinking about learning, the combination of active participation by the learner and incorporation of past experiences, necessitates a change in the development of educational programs in order to provide the best opportunities for student learning.

Coming from this philosophical background, cognitive scientist Howard Gardner, in his work at Harvard's Project Zero and ARTS PROPEL, has developed the perspective that, ". . . artistry is first and foremost an activity of the mind. Like much other mental activity, artistic perception and production involves the use of symbols." He further contends that an, "...artistically-competent individual is one who is able to 'read' and to 'write' symbols in such realms as literature, music or sculpture" (Darby & Catterall, 1994, p. 304-305). Gardner (1993, p.7) in his theory of multiple intelligences, contends that intelligence is, "the ability to solve problems or to fashion products, that are valued in one or more cultural or community settings."

He believes that these intelligences exist in at least seven separate areas: musical, bodily-kinesthetic, logical-mathematical, linguistic, spatial, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Curriculum in our schools has been presented and evaluated mainly in only two of these areas: linguistic and logical/mathematical. Yet, all students do not learn through these two methods. Current curricular designs deny those students, whose strengths are in other areas, from drawing upon the intelligences that would give them the maximum potential for learning. By approaching a topic in a variety of ways, such as a dramatic performance or an artistic experience, the schools can successfully reach and teach more students than is currently taking place. Gardner (1995, p. 208) calls this state of affairs, "multiple windows leading into the same room." With this understanding of the importance of the arts, Gardner and David Perkins challenge the idea that the arts are extras added to the curriculum and should be the first things cut during tight fiscal times (Darby & Catterall, 1994).

Other research supports Gardner in his evaluation of the importance of the arts. Gallas (1991) was challenged, as are many teachers today, with the task of teaching and assessing students who had very limited knowledge of the English language. Yet she was able to successfully meet the needs of her students through non-traditional forms of teaching and assessment. Students like Juan, who spoke very little English, were still able to communicate what they were learning through the arts. Though his English vocabulary was limited, young Juan had learned the word "paint." Drawing, modeling, painting, and constructing were his passion and his way of showing just what he was learning. Detailed drawings of life cycles of various insects, done repeatedly to refine and correct misinformation, visually showed his teacher what Juan could not yet sufficiently verbalize in English. Knowledge was there. Learning was

occurring. Through the arts, students were able to transcend their current deficiencies, whether it was a language or a cultural barrier. Others were encouraged and reinforced when their, "modes of communication and expressions did fit the predominant classroom discourse." No matter what her students' abilities, interests, or preferred methods of learning were, incorporating the arts in her classroom made it possible for all the children to participate successfully in school.

In an evaluation of an interdisciplinary arts education program of the Minnesota Center for Arts Education (1992, p. 15) positive comments also gave support to arts integration. "Interdisciplinary education addresses various learning styles of students, such as visual and kinesthetic. Hands-on, participatory and interactive methods of teaching and learning are favored in this approach to learning. Teaching this way can "find a way to involve all the different types of people in the class.'"

Curricular Criticisms. With the vast amount of information that is available and constantly growing, there is a resulting conflict in what should be included in the curriculum. Teachers and students are frustrated with fragmented schedules where bits and pieces of information are provided and few connections made between the subjects. In Brandt (1991), Jacobs contends that with the growing amount of knowledge, choosing an integrated approach can help alleviate those problems and give students a better understanding of an interrelated world.

When teaching a particular theme, concept, or problem, integration of the arts with different subject areas can make education more meaningful and relevant for more students. As reported by Hanna (1992), dancers in one high school are being taught and applying the principles of momentum, energy, force, and velocity in their physics class in order to critique and

improve their dancing ability. Yasso (1991) describes his use of paintings, particularly those of seascapes, river and mountain landscapes, with his Earth systems education class. In these classes, he asks about the earth processes being shown and their accurate or inaccurate portrayal. He then encourages his students to write about their observations of the various scientific effects as depicted in the paintings.

When the arts are used as they are in Project FLARE, they become an integral part of the learning experience. As Aschbacher (1996, p. 40) describes it, FLARE (Fun with Language, Arts, and Reading) is a cooperative program, ". . .designed to increase elementary students' mastery of language and visual arts, understanding of diverse cultures, awareness and appreciation of the arts, and repertoire of personal expression." Results of the integrated arts activities had a powerful effect on language because it increased the students' awareness of details. This carried over to their oral and written work where students used more accurate and elaborate vocabulary. The arts were no longer an add on, but became a, "potent stimulus for a thoughtful exploration and communication of complex ideas."

Methodology

Much of the research on arts integration has been about programs involving private educational organizations, arts schools, or students drawn to an arts curriculum. Based on these previous studies, the arts clearly have had a significant impact on students in specific arts-based programs. However, little research has been done evaluating the effects of arts integration in the typical elementary, middle or high school. The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of including the arts as an integrated component of the regular school curriculum.

Data Source and Procedures. This study involved eleven school districts across the state of Pennsylvania who were participating in a federally funded program to create an integrated, multidisciplinary curriculum framework model. The eleven districts included in the study were situated in rural, suburban, or urban settings, with elementary, middle and high school grade levels represented. The schools were linked with a partner from an institution of higher education who worked with the schools at various levels to develop their units. The study focused on integration of the arts, history, civics, English, and geography with each district having one or more of the arts (dance, visual arts, music, or theater) as the focal point of the unit or program they developed. Some schools developed units within their current curriculum while others created entirely new units of study outside the existing curriculum. These units of study lasted from a few weeks to the entire school year.

Data was gathered from in-depth, structured interviews conducted with seventy teachers and administrators and twenty-five students over a one year period. Each interview was tape-recorded and transcribed for further analysis. A variety of questions was asked about the programs, including the affect of the integration process on the students.

Results and Conclusions

One area that was substantiated by teachers and administrators repeatedly was an increase in students' self-concept and positive attitude toward school. A number of schools confirmed these findings with stories of students suddenly blossoming when the regular curriculum became integrated with the arts. One high school student, who had a negative reputation among students and staff, was given the opportunity to use his knowledge of the visual arts within a year long integrated course of study. Being the only student in the program who was also enrolled in the

art class at his school, he had some technical, background knowledge that most of the other students did not. When he was able to share his knowledge and speak intelligently using words such as "analysis" and "interpretation" about works of art, students and teachers were quite surprised and impressed. As a result, other students began to go to him for help with something they were doing in their integrated course thus gaining a higher respect among his peers and the staff. Previously, his talent had been recognized and used in only his art class. Now, because of his involvement in an integrated arts program, he was allowed to draw upon that talent, making connections between his art and his academics. In turn, he began to take his academic work more seriously, helping him to become a better student.

Similar reports were repeated throughout the interviews. At one elementary school that was studying the minuet during their Early American Social Studies unit, a taciturn, withdrawn young man was so upset when his dancing partner had to leave before class was over that he strode across the gym and announced, to the amazement of his teachers, that his partner had to leave and he needed a new partner for the remainder of the class. His pronouncement consisted of more words than any of the teachers had previously heard him say at any one time. For him, dancing had become a very important part of his schooling. Another student, who constantly talked about the "stupidity" of the integrated course that he was enrolled in at the beginning of the year, was reproaching his fellow students at the end of the year for not having a serious attitude about the class's work. Teachers reported students assuming leadership roles who had not previously done so. A decrease in student absenteeism was noted, with one school marking a 34% decrease in absenteeism for the same group of students during the previous school year. Comments such as, "We hate to miss school," and "We don't like when subs come in," were also

heard throughout the schools. According to some students, homework was, ". . .never boring," and teachers heard fewer and fewer comments such as, "Why are we doing this." In those classes where the ESL and learning support students were included with the regular education students, teachers noted there was a more equitable learning atmosphere between all the students in the arts related classes. A number of teachers related how the slower learning students took their arts related work much more seriously and produced much higher quality work than their faster learning peers.

A number of schools incorporated drama as well as music and the visual arts in their programs, using these areas in their assessments of the students' knowledge. Students reported that "showing" their understanding in this manner provided a more "tangible learning experience" for themselves and helped them to better understand what they were learning. They didn't forget what they had learned, as they usually did when just studying for tests, but retained the information throughout the year.

Numerous comments negated the criticisms about irrelevant/fragmented curriculum. "Being able to see how one area touches another, makes it "easier to learn," according to one group of sixth graders. "Although they changed classes, they didn't have to change gears." "When you learn something here, you really get into it and it makes it easier to see connections and to understand." In one integrated class, a student was puzzled about what to write for the heading of his paper; normally, he would write "English" or "Social Studies." That didn't seem to fit for what he was learning. After a moments thought, he told his teacher, "I guess we should just put "Learning." Teachers also commented that students were more likely to interject comments during class discussions that reflected knowledge of related materials not directly

taught. They also came to realize that they didn't have a true understanding of a topic until they knew its component parts and the relationship of these parts to each other.

While it is too early to tell whether there will be long-term gains in student achievement, preliminary results based on teacher, administrator and student interviews suggest that many students have gained a greater understanding of content in all related subject areas. It has given students the opportunity to be presented with the same information in a multitude of ways thus providing the students with more opportunities to comprehend what they are to learn. Because of an integrated curriculum, students are beginning to see the connections between subjects, realizing what they learn in one area is important to other areas. This new presentation of the arts has also provided students with an opportunity to discover new areas of strengths and interests they may otherwise not have realized.

Additionally, students have shown they like being involved in integrated arts courses. Teachers have found that students have become so interested in what they were doing in their integrated classes that they continued their study of a particular area independently. When they like it, they want to learn. They want to do their best. They are excited and want to be involved. School becomes a place where they want to come.

Educational Implications

The research on curriculum integration and the arts is slim but growing. However, research gathered thus far is showing that arts integration within the regular curriculum can provide answers to some of the criticisms that are being leveled at education. Turning students on to school, making learning easier and more meaningful, and helping them understand the importance of the relationship between different subjects have proven to be possible through an

integrated arts program. Realizing the importance of these findings, administrators need to provide the resources for their teachers to become involved in or develop integrated programs. These innovative teachers in turn need to share their experiences and report their findings and experiences. In this way, the growing body of positive results being gathered about arts integration will increasingly effect local decision making and curriculum design. The need to justify integration of the arts should diminish. The main question asked will not be whether or not it should be done, be how to implement integration of the arts, an important key to unlocking the potential of many students.

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